



## **South Atlantic Fishery Bulletin**

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**FB17-012**

**FISHERY BULLETIN ISSUE DATE:** February 21, 2017

**CONTACT:** Karla Gore, 727-824-5305, [Karla.Gore@noaa.gov](mailto:Karla.Gore@noaa.gov)

### **Request for Comments: Proposed Rule to Modify Management of Atlantic Cobia (Georgia through New York)**

#### **KEY MESSAGE:**

NOAA Fisheries requests your comments on a proposed rule to implement Framework Amendment 4 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region (Framework Amendment 4).

Measures for Atlantic cobia in the proposed rule for Framework Amendment 4 would:

- increase the recreational minimum size limit
- reduce the recreational bag limit
- establish a recreational vessel limit
- establish a commercial trip limit
- modify the recreational accountability measure

The proposed actions are expected to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the recreational and commercial Atlantic cobia catch limits in future years.

The 2016 and 2017 recreational fishing seasons for Atlantic cobia were shortened due to the overage of the catch limits.

#### **SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CHANGES:**

- For the Atlantic cobia recreational fishery, the proposed actions include an increase to the minimum size limit from 33 inches fork length to 36 inches fork length. In addition, the proposed rule specifies a bag limit of one fish per person per day, or six fish per vessel per day, whichever is more restrictive.

- For the Atlantic cobia commercial fishery, the proposed actions include a commercial trip limit of two fish per person per day or six fish per vessel per day, whichever is more restrictive.
- The proposed rule would also modify the accountability measure for the recreational sector. If the recreational and total catch limits (commercial and recreational combined) are exceeded, NOAA Fisheries would reduce the vessel limit, and if necessary, shorten the following season.

**HOW TO COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED RULE:**

The comment period is open now through March 23, 2017. You may submit comments by electronic submission or by postal mail. Comments sent by any other method (such as e-mail), to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NOAA Fisheries.

**FORMAL FEDERAL REGISTER NAME/NUMBER:** 82 FR 11166, published February 21, 2017

**Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal.

1. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0167-0001>.
2. Click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields.
3. Enter or attach your comments.

**Mail:** Submit written comments to Karla Gore, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)**

### **What are the actions in the proposed rule for Framework Amendment 4?**

- Recreational minimum size limit: Increase in the minimum size limit for recreationally caught Atlantic cobia from 33 inches to 36 inches fork length.
- Recreational bag/vessel limits: Specify a bag limit of one fish per person per day or a vessel limit of six fish per day, whichever is more restrictive.
- Commercial trip limit: Establish a commercial trip limit of two fish per person per day or six fish per vessel per day, whichever is more restrictive.
- Modify the recreational accountability measure: If the recreational and total catch limits (commercial and recreational combined) are exceeded, NOAA Fisheries would reduce the vessel limit, and if necessary, shorten the following season.

### **Where would these regulations apply?**

- These proposed regulations would apply to the Atlantic group cobia, which extends from Georgia through New York.
- Cobia off the east coast of Florida are part of the Gulf of Mexico migratory group.
- The boundary between the Gulf of Mexico migratory group and the Atlantic migratory group is the Georgia/Florida border.
- Genetic information from the most recent population assessment for cobia indicates that the Gulf of Mexico cobia stock extends through the Florida east coast.

### **Why are these changes needed?**

- In 2015 and 2016, recreational landings for Atlantic cobia exceeded the recreational catch limit and the stock catch limit. The current accountability measure is to reduce the length of the following recreational season by the amount necessary to ensure recreational landings achieve the recreational annual catch target, but not exceed the recreational catch limit.
- Based on the accountability measure, the recreational portion of the Atlantic group cobia was closed in federal waters on June 20, 2016, and January 24, 2017.
- The actions in Framework Amendment 4 are intended to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the stock catch limit and triggering the accountability measures in the future.

### **Where can I find more information on Framework Amendment 4?**

- Contact NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

**By Mail:** Karla Gore  
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
263 13th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

**By FAX:** (727) 824-5308  
**By Phone:** (727) 824-5305

- Framework Amendment 4 may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Web site  
at: [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/gulf\\_sa/cmp/2016/framework\\_am4/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_sa/cmp/2016/framework_am4/index.html)
- Additional information on management of cobia in the South Atlantic may be found  
at: [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/gulf\\_sa/cmp/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_sa/cmp/index.html)

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- Immediate fishery openings and closures
- Any significant changes to fishing regulations that happen quickly

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- **Gulf of Mexico Commercial Fisheries Related Alerts**
  - Text GULFCOMMFISH to 888777
- **South Atlantic Recreational Fisheries Related Alerts**
  - Text SATLRECFISH to 888777
- **South Atlantic Commercial Fisheries Related Alerts**
  - Text SATLCOMMFISH to 888777
- **Caribbean Fisheries Related Alerts**
  - Text CARIBFISH to 888777

#### **Other contacts:**

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